

Documentation does not Revitalize: Conflicting goals and Ethical dilemmas

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ICLDC 6

*Connecting Communities,
Languages and Technology*



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Roadmap

1. The point
2. How did we get here? A little bit of history
3. Into the thick
 1. Following the money trail
 2. A long-term, best-case scenario case
4. Final Reflections





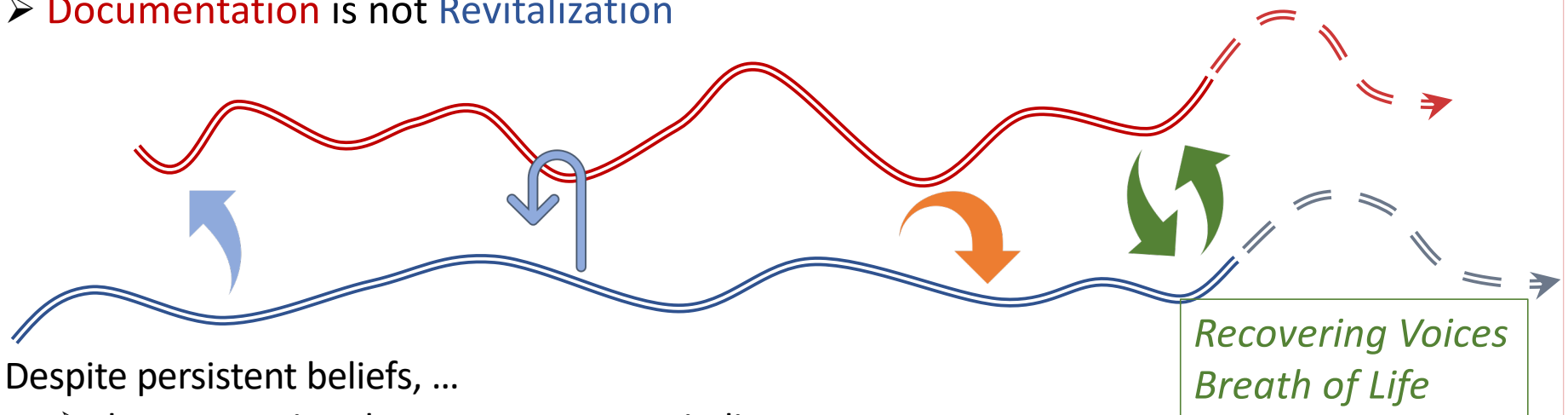
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1. The point: 2 stories, 2 paths

➤ Documentation is not Revitalization



Despite persistent beliefs, ...

- documentation does not, per se, revitalize.
- two very different endeavors, with two very different objectives.
- EVEN ... in cases where documentation includes collaborative practices with the community,
 - ... benefits follow for the field of Linguistics
 - ... but not for the vitality of linguistic practices within the speaking community.



1. The point: 2 stories, 2 paths

Documentation is not Revitalization

- This work intersects....
 - the areas of assessing success in documentation and revitalization strategies,
 - Community-based and Participatory Action Research experiences of documentation/revitalization and
 - Ethical issues





1. The point: 2 stories, 2 paths

Documentation is not Revitalization

The main points are:

- that despite the persistence of pairing down Documentation and Revitalization, these two are very different endeavors that target very different objectives; and
- that efforts to combine Documentation with collaborative practices with the speaking community have resulted in benefits to the academic field of Linguistics but not to the vitality of linguistic practices within the speaking community.

Ethical issues arise from

- the persistent refusal of the field at recognizing these points and
- making Documentation a *de facto* process of museization of *exotic* languages.
 - ... Issues of sovereignty (who has *control*)



2. How did we get here? A bit of history

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2. How did we get here? A bit of history

A bit of history background ... where are we coming from (as a field)?

>> the structural properties of the *system* , not just the *individuals* in it.

- Hale et al.: seminal 1992 *Language* paper
 - >> calling attention to the dire situation of an alarmingly increasing number of languages losing ground,
- the field reacts and
 - >> turns its attention to Documenting endangered languages.
 - >> several funding programs
- Almost 30 years later, however, ...
 - >> most of these efforts have massively benefitted the field of Linguistics, not (necessarily) the speaking communities.
(and despite some well-meaning and well-directed initiatives,)

- Documentation is for Linguistics
- Revitalization/ Strengthening is for Community



3. Into the thick

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3. Into the thick

- Documentation is not Revitalization
 - ✓ Documentation is for Linguistics
 - ✓ Revitalization/ Strengthening is for Community

Evidence:

1. Follow the money trail
 - ... i.e., the requirements and the focus of the funding agencies
2. Follow a case experience
 - ... a long-term, best-case scenario experience and evaluate the current status



3.1 The money trail

Why follow the money?

... because it reveals where the actual objective is...

➤ Examine the requirements of funding agencies ...

an obsessive insistence on *archiving* language material,

- No/little consideration for the format and accessibility of the data archived to the language community and
- No/little consideration for the concern of elders about control of the language
(e.g., Czykowska-Higgins et al about the real meaning and implications of the notion of 'consent').
- Archives are located in western institutions, far removed from speaking communities, and
- little effort is made to create local in-house alternatives to those archives
- Little/no consideration for *whose* needs are served by an archive
(since a healthy language in a community is in itself a *live archive*).



3.1 The money trail

Why follow the money?

... because it reveals where the actual objective is...

➤ These modern Archives

- ✓ are mostly of benefit to the endeavors of professional linguists and
- ✓ do little *by themselves* to strengthen endangered languages
- ✓ extra efforts, specific actions
 - are required to make the connection between documentation and revitalization
 - but they are NOT funded by the agencies driving Documentation



3.2 The Case



The Mayangna, of Nicaragua.



3.2 The Case



Location



Mayanga

Ulwa

Miskitu

Kriol

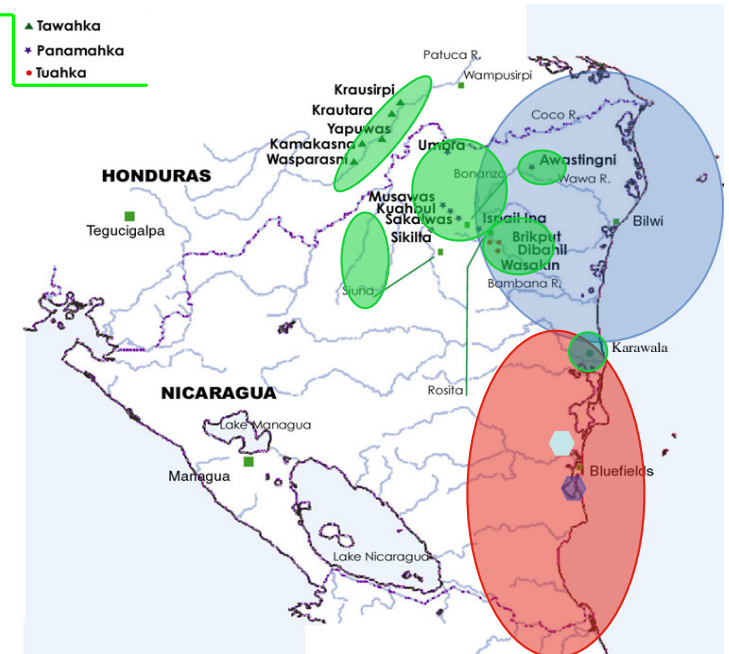
Rama

Garífuna

▲ Tawahka

● Panamahka

● Tuahka





3.2 The Case

Background

- Revolution 1979
- Literacy Campaign
- Bilingual Programs (1985>)
- 1990
- SEAR (National Education System)

Kinder
Primary School
Secondary School (Middle and High School)
University

Human Resources Training

- Teacher 'professionalization' training
- Normal schools
- URACCAN:
 - Bachelor's Degree in Bilingual Education
 - >> Mayangna Yulbarangyang Balna
 - *Diplomados comunitarios*
- IPILC (institute for Linguistics and Cultural Strengthening)

3.2 The Case

Characteristics

- wide ranging bilingual school system
- born from down up >> state control
- training of local resources >> informal >> formal >> university
- creation of a local team of linguists
- progression ... curve up – up -up ... and then sharp down



The “but” [+PL]:

- Resistance from the ‘system’
 - government-led resources
 - university (local) ideologies
- Persistence of underlying power system



3.2 The Case

We can verify that:

- these initiatives have created a significant body of professional indigenous linguists
- their work significantly contributes to the development of the linguistics field,
- but that the vitality of the language itself has entered into recession.





4. Final Reflections

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4. Final Reflections

Considerations:

- the role of local ideologies, both external and internal
 - Benedicto et al, on Mayangna;
 - Freeland, on the Tuahka;
 - Grinevald, on Rama project
- the role of funding agencies
- the role of *academia*
- ...

- POWER structures and the forces for RESISTING CHANGE.
- we need to *deal with* the powerful!

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Thanks !!

Gracias !!

Tingki palni !!



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